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ABSTRACT

The availability of continuing education for deaf adults is critical for their success in today's society. The shift from an industrialized society to a post-industrial society and the growth in service industries are not favorable for deaf adults who have not traditionally been trained for technically oriented and high-growth service jobs. In addition to the dilemmas faced by deaf adults because of rapid technological and career changes, they are also confronted by the movement toward a participatory democracy that places greater demands on the citizens. In light of these issues, the idea of lifelong learning must be fostered for deaf adults to keep them abreast of the social, political, and economic changes. The theories and practices of education for hearing adults are quite applicable to the education of deaf adults. Experiential learning, self-directedness in learning, pedagogical and andragogical approaches, and the fostering of autonomy are equally important to the education of deaf adults. (YLB)

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Adult Learning and Development and the Adult Deaf Learner

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Continuing education has been a growing field in providing services to adults wishing to further their education beyond their formal education. Lifelong learning and self-directed learning are common terms used in discussions and research in adult education. The need for adult education and lifelong learning are no different for the deaf adults.

> Each year, approximately 5,000 hearing-impaired students graduate from schools or programs designed to meet their educational needs. Upon entering the world of independent living, may are without any means of continuing their education which is, for the deaf, not only valuable for advancement and socialization but essential for survival (Malone, 1986).

Why is the "availability of continuing education for the deaf adults critical for success in today's society (Malone, 1986)?" The twentieth century has been a period of "rapid major cultural changes, such as massive input of new knowledge, technological innovation, vocational displacement, population mobility, change in political and economic systems" (Knowles, 1980). Before the early years of this century, the time-span of major cultural changes was greater than the life-span of the individual. What people learned in their youth remained valid and useful for the rest of their lives. This is not true any more. Many major cultural changes have occurred during this century and the time-span of these changes have been much shorter than the life-span of the individual. The pace continues to accelerate (Knowles, 1980).

One of the most fundamental changes being observed within the United States is the "movement away from an industrialized society to a post-industrial society" (Foster, 1986). In addition, there is a movement from an "industrial society to an information society" (Malone, 1986). These trends are telling us that the fastest growth of new jobs is in the service production industries such as transportation, communications, public

utilities, finance, insurance, real estate, and government. There is also much growth in industries such as medical care, business services, professional services and non-profit organizations (Foster, 1986). Computerization also has a large impact on industries with the increased use of robotics which has been reducing the available number of positions in the industrial areas (Malone, 1986).

These trends are not favorable for many adults and especially for deaf adults. Deaf people have not traditionally been trained for technically oriented jobs or high growth service jobs. They are over-concentrated in manufacturing industries and under-represented in the professions and occupations emphasizing person-to-person communications such as management, sales and service occupations (Foster, 1986).

K. Patricia Cross (1981) also studied the effects of today's changing technology. The factors she listed as stimulants to job-related education were job obsolescence, increased longevity (people are working more years), more women in the labor force, job competition, higher aspirations, greater social acceptability of career change and portability of pension plans.

The rapid technological and career changes are not the only dilemmas faced by the deaf adults. There is also a movement toward a participatory democracy which places greater demands on the citizens. In becoming more involved in the products being consumed, larger number of citizens are expressing interest in the workings of government, writing to congressmen and congresswomen voicing their opinion. More parents are becoming involved in the workings of their children's schooling (Malone, 1986). To me, these are very positive trends and the deaf adults should be just as involved in their children's education and community affairs as the hearing adults. But, the interactions between the deaf and hearing are often strained

because of the communication barriers (Higgins, 1980). To overcome these barriers, the deaf adults should have the opportunity to continue their education beyond their formal schooling to help them become "integrated into a 'different' society" (Higgins, 1980).

In light of these aforementioned issues, the idea of life-long learning (or continuing education) must be fostered for any adult to keep abreast of the social, political and economic changes. Learning does not and should not end when individuals, deaf or hearing, receive their high school diplomas or college degrees.

> Lifelong learning is not a privilege or a right; it is simply a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with the escalating pace of change--in the family, on the job, in the community, and in the world-wide society (Cross, 1981).

As important as the ideas of lifelong learning is, intrinsic motivation has a significant role in any adult's need to be lifelong or self-directed learners. Adult needs and expectations for what they are taught will powerfully influence how they motivationally respond to what they are taught (Wlodkowski, 1985). Brookfield (1984) said that an activity can only be considered educational if the skills developed or the bodies of knowledge acquired by the learners are in some way deemed innately valuable and worthwhile.

> Developing in adults a sense of their personal power and self-worth is seen as a fundamental underpinning to the concept of adult education. Only if such a sense of individual empowerment and self-esteem is realized will adults possess the emotional strength to engage in that form of personally significant learning which is seen as the outcome of adult education; that is, to challenge values, behaviors and beliefs which have been uncritically assimilated by learners and which may be publicly accepted by the majority as common sense. The task of educators, according to this rationale, becomes that of encouraging that form of learning involving the perception of the relative and contextual nature of previously unquestioned givens. The educator insists the adult to reflect on the manner by which values, beliefs, and behaviors previously deemed sacrosanct can be critically analyzed.

> Through presenting alternate ways of interpreting the world to adults, the educator prompts individuals to consider ways of thinking and living alternative to those they already possess... at the very least a consequence of this re-creation of personal and social worlds is a developing sense of control and autonomy in the adults (Brookfield, 1985).

Adults are highly pragmatic learners (Wlodkowski, 1985). "... The major emphasis in adult learning is on the practical rather than the academic; on the applied rather than the theoretical; and on skills rather than on knowledge or information (Cross, 1981)."

Adults' experiences are a rich resource for learning. Adults learn more effectively through experiential techniques of education such as discussion or problem-solving (Knowles, 1980). This is true for both deaf and hearing adults and should never be overlooked. This andragogical assumption was strongly supported by Brookfield (1986) and Cross (1981). Deaf and hearing people have similar life experiences. If they were to read "Havighurst's Developmental Tasks" (Craig, 1983), they would realize that most healthy adults have the same responsibilities and tasks (select a mate, manage a home, rear children, adjust to aging, etc.). Their needs for continued learning could be prompted by these changing responsibilities and tasks, calamitous events (divorce, loss of job, death), and so forth.

Their greatest difference between the two groups is in communication. As mentioned before, it does have a profound impact on the interaction between deaf and hearing people. Because of the deaf people's unique communication needs and problems, they are often viewed as "outsiders in a hearing world" (Higgins, 1980).

> Deafness is subtle and paradoxical, and it ramifies far beyond the immediate disability. It imposes few physical limitations but its effects on social life and academic performance can be severe. It cripples neither the mind or the body, but the ability to use our most elemental and pervasive form of communication, the human voice. Thus,

it strikes at the core of social life and of education... (Gallaudet College, 1979, Malone, 1986).

Because of the communication barriers, the deaf adults often lack the availability of continuing education critical for success in today's society. The adult deaf learner has been called "a very neglected species" (Malone, 1986).

There are other andragogical assumptions besides experiences as rich resources for learning that are worthy of consideration. Although they were written with hearing adults in mind, they are applicable to deaf adults as well. They are:

1) The self-concept of the learners moves from one of being a dependent personality (pedagogical) to toward being a self-directed human being;

2) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles;

3) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge (pedagogical) to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness (pedagogical) to one of performance-centeredness (Knowles, 1980).

As mentioned before, these are only assumptions, and not as a result of empirical studies. At one time, Knowles dichotomized pedagogy and andragogy which caused much discussion and disagreement among the adult educators. In his revised edition of The Modern Practice of Adult Education, he thought of the two learning principles as a continuum. My own teaching experience supports this idea. Pedagogical and andragogical approaches can be used interchangeably depending on the academic abilities of the learners, both young students and adults. When introducing new materials or new concepts, it may be quite appropriate to use the pedagogical approaches of lecturing, assigning textbook readings, and so forth. As the learners gain familiarity

and comfort with the subject matter or concept, experiments, problem-solving cases, role playing, field experiences are valuable andragogical learning experiences. These kinds of experiences guide the learners toward self-directedness.

Along with self-directedness comes the sense of autonomy in the learners. Brookfield (1986) defined autonomy as "the possession of an understanding and awareness of a range of alternative possibilities."

> The most fully adult form of self-directed learning, however, is one in which critical reflection on the contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of alternative perspectives and meaning systems, and the alteration of personal and social circumstances are all present (Brookfield, 1986).

To foster such sense of autonomy, the opinions, ideas and wishes of the learners should be addressed and respected. Research indicates that people will more readily accept decisions that affect them when they are involved in making those decisions themselves. Such an opportunity will encourage public support of these decisions and active involvement in a program (Costello, 1977). This is just as true for the deaf adults as for any adults. Regardless if it is a program or service, it "must be <u>of</u> and <u>by</u> deaf adults, as well as <u>for</u> them, if it is to succeed" (Costello, 1977).

In conclusion, the theories and practices of education of hearing adults are quite applicable to the education of deaf adults. Fostering lifelong learning among the deaf will assist them in meeting the ever-changing challenges in their economic, social and political environment. Their unique communication needs should not be thought of as an insurmountable barrier to their potential of becoming self-directed learners.

> The practical and conceptual heart of self-directedness in learning is the control over learning processes and curriculum content exercised by

the learners themselves. If adults believe that the form of learning in which they do exercise control (that is, self-directed learning) is of innately inferior quality, then a belief in their own power to change their individual and social reality remains dormant. The act of learning - of deliberately choosing to acquire certain skills, knowledge or affective dispositions - must be one of the most fundamental features by which we define what it means to be fully human. It is through learning that we alter our own personhood,... or that we can reconstruct our social environment. Once adults believe that the act of learning can be undertaken without the approval or assistance of professional educators or that the locus of control can remain centered in the adult learner, then a realization is created that adults have the power to alter their individual and social environment and to create their own reality (Brookfield, 1984).

Recommendations for Further Study

1. The issue of learning styles appeared in Brookfield's work and in my own mind. Which learning styles are closely associated with a self-directed learner? At NTID, the Hanson-Silver Learning Styles Inventory is used. There are four types: 1) ST (sensing-thinking), 2) NT (intuitive-thinking), 3) NF (intuitive-feeling), 4) SF (sensing-feeling). They can also be described by the main learning activity: 1) ST (mastery), 2) NT (understanding), 3) NF (synthesis), 4) IF (involvement). Could a self-directed learner have any of the four types?

2. As our society moves to a more participatory democracy and becoming more involved in the working of our national, state and local governments, is there a relationship between self-directedness and political socialization (or activism)? Is it possible that the more self-directed an adult is, the more he or she becomes involved in community affairs, and their children's schooling? Do they become active in expressing their opinions to their congressional or legislative representatives? Are they more apt to register to vote and actually vote? If not, what are the barriers to their becoming more politically active in their community affairs as well as national issues? Did their formal education prepare them in dealing with civic issues? Do they know about the available services they can access to assist them in their civic affairs and duties? Again, does being more self-directed have anything to do with their becoming more politically active?

3. How would the deaf adults describe their academic background? Was their schooling highly-structured and teacher-centered or did they experience a student-centered, performance-oriented learning experience? How did these experiences motivate, positively or negatively, their desire to continue their education as independent adults? These are some of the questions that would explore the impacts of pedagogical and andragogical methods of instruction.

4. The deaf adults, as well as everyone else, are experiencing great changes in their social, economic and political lives. How do they feel about these changes? Are there any barriers to accepting change? Does the sense of self-directedness make the acceptance of change easier? Has change prompted them to do something about their education?

5. In regards to any of the questions, are there any differences among adults who went to schools for the deaf, mainstreamed programs or public schools (not receiving special support)? Have any of these educational experiences influenced the way they responded to any of the questions regarding politics, change, learning styles and preferences?

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